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January 26, 1960

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
January 25, 1960

Others present: Secretaries Herter, Rubottom,
Ambassador Bonsal, Generals Persons and
Goodpaster

Mr. Herter said Ambassador Bonsal had not wanted to return from Cuba. He feels that a danger to U. S. citizens there may develop, and did not wish to be away in that event. He was instructed to return, however, because Mr. Herter felt our Ambassador should not be subjected to indignities. The President asked as to the experience of the Spanish Ambassador on his departure, and Ambassador Bonsal said that he was subjected to indignities. Mr. Bonsal said the Cuban Government is trying to link the U. S. to Spain through the President's visit with Franco. The President said he had gone to Spain among other reasons as a means of showing a courtesy toward Spanish-speaking people -- a courtesy which he thought the Latin Americans would appreciate.

Ambassador Bonsal said there is a great concern among responsible people in Cuba regarding the arming of workers and peasants. He said that Castro's group think that they have discovered something new called "democratic humanism." They claim they are not anti-religious, but are trying to carry out agrarian reforms which the church has supported in times past. He added that the church is trying hard not to break with Castro.

The President said that Castro begins to look like a mad man. Mr. Bonsal said he is a very conspiratorial individual who tries to create the impression that he and Cuba are beleaguered. He is an extreme Leftist and is strongly anti-American.

The President said his great current problem is to keep the Congress from running out completely on the sugar bill. He thought the best plan is to give the power of decision to the President. Mr. Herter said the press will probably ask what we plan to do regarding the sugar bill. The President thought

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it was best simply to say that we will be sending something to the Congress on this.

The President said he thought the best course of action in the hemisphere would be if the OAS went down the line for us in trying to put some restraints on Castro. There may be a problem in Venezuela, he recognized.

Mr. Rubottom said Mexico is also a problem -- probably the greatest -- but commented that Lopez-Mateos has said he deplores the resort to non-constitutional procedures. Mr. Rubottom said it would be hard to get the fourteen votes required in the OAS to support the United States point of view, and that even if they were obtained, the OAS action would not be effective in Cuba. He thought the only solution would come through the development of a moderate and responsible force from within Cuba. This he thought would probably take many months. The President said that supposing the situation gets worse, he would not desert our citizens. If the OAS is not going to support us, they show themselves as fair weather friends and we may have to take other action. Mr. Rubottom said in such circumstances the OAS might act along the lines we suggest. This would not, however, bring a full solution, and it is better to let a moderate native force build up. The President said that, if it comes to such conditions, we could quarantine Cuba. If they (the Cuban people) are hungry, they will throw Castro out. Ambassador Bonsal said we should not punish the whole Cuban people for the acts of one abnormal man. The President said that of course he agreed with this.

Mr. Herter next showed the President a draft of a proposed statement. The President edited this and asked that certain further revisions be made, and that it be resubmitted then.

The President asked if there are evident Communist activities in Cuba. Mr. Bonsal said the Communists have a very active newspaper, and that many of the foreigners who hold influential positions in the Cuban Government are under Communist influence. The President asked how Cuba could make a living if it was unable to sell its sugar. Mr. Bonsal said the present government had not thought that problem out. Mr. Rubottom commented that a Cuban emissary is now travelling in Latin America trying to build


up support for a meeting of the "underprivileged" countries and is getting a very cold reception. Mr. Bonsal said the Cubans are trying to whittle down the free world and enlarge the number of uncommitted countries.

The President said he was very favorably impressed with President Lopez-Mateos of Mexico and was hopeful he could have some influence in the situation. Mr. Rubottom said that Lopez-Mateos is still on his trip through Latin America.

Secretary Herter commented that Mexico's voting record in the UN has not been too good from our point of view. They have voted against us on a number of occasions. Mr. Rubottom said this results largely from a single individual, Padilla Nervo. Others such as the Foreign Minister and the Ambassador in Washington are most helpful.

Mr. Herter said he foresaw two questions, the first on sugar. The President said on this he would simply say the matter is being studied and something will be sent to Congress. The President thought it should be stressed that the Cubans will not voluntarily accept Communist dictatorship over their individual lives. Mr. Herter said the second question is whether our Ambassador is going back. The President thought on that he would say that no decision has been made.

The President asked that Mr. Rubottom inform Senator Fulbright and Congressman Morgan that he plans to make a friendly but firm statement on this matter. With regard to the recall of the Cuban Ambassador, the President said that we would say no decision has yet been made. He asked whether there had been any demonstration against Mr. Bonsal on the latter's departure. Mr. Bonsal said there had not been. The people were quite friendly. A number of his colleagues came out to be present at his departure.


A. J. Goodpaster
Brigadier General, USA